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ABSTRACT

A profile of Sierra Leone is sketched in this paper. Emphasis is placed on the nature, scope, and accomplishments of population activities in the country. Topics and sub-topics include: location and description of the country; population (size, growth patterns, age structure, urban/rural distribution, ethnic and religious composition, migration, literacy, economic status, future trends); population growth and socio-economic development (relationships to national income, size of the labor force, agriculture, social welfare expenditures); history of population concerns; population policies; population programs (objectives, organization, operations, research and evaluation); private efforts in family planning; educational and scientific efforts in population; and foreign assistance for family planning activities. (RH)

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SIERRA LEONE

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Location and Description

Sierra Leone is a small almost circular nation on the west coast of Africa. Its climate is tropical, with clearly defined dry and rainy seasons. Among nations, it ranks approximately 100th in both area and population size. Historically, Sierra Leone was first established in 1787 to provide a home for freed or liberated Africans in Africa. In that early period, settlement was limited to a small peninsula known officially as the Colony. The remainder of present day Sierra Leone did not come under English rule until a British Protectorate was established over the area in 1896. Today the former Colony is known as the Western Area, while the original Protectorate now forms three Provinces.

According to the 1963 Census, approximately 91 per cent of the population lived in the Provinces, while 9 per cent lived in the Western Area. The Western Area, however, had a density of over 900 persons per square mile, as compared with an average density of about 80 persons per square mile in the Provinces. This suggests the limited size of the Western Area—215 square miles out of a total of 27,699—and the presence of the capital, Freetown, within its borders.

Population

Size

The population of Sierra Leone was estimated in 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931, and 1948. In general, specific ratios established in key villages were used to approximate total population in nonenumerated areas. Since the results were not very reliable, the true size of the population was not known until the 1963 Census. This count, as the first complete enumeration ever carried out in Sierra Leone, indicated a population of 2,180,355. When this figure is adjusted to midyear 1963, and corrected for 5 per cent underenumeration, a final total for 1963 of 2,297,964 is obtained.

Although the defective character of earlier population estimates greatly obscures the question of population growth (intercensal annual growth rates seem to range arbitrarily from a high of 3.1 per cent, for the period 1901–11, to a low of 0.3 per cent, for the period 1931–48), the Central Statistics Office believes that an annual increase of 1.5 per cent may be appropriate for the years preceding and following the 1963 Census. Under this assumption, the population would have increased to 2,512,686 in 1969.

Growth Patterns

Unfortunately, it is not possible to compute the present rate of natural increase from recorded birth and death rates. Although the registration of vital events is officially obligatory throughout the country, the Registration Office considers the coverage to be highly unsatisfactory outside the Western Area. Using 1963 as the most reliable base year, rates were computed for the Western Area as follows: in Freetown, a crude birth rate of 52, a crude death rate of 18, and an infant mortality rate of 105; in the Western Rural Area, comparable figures of 30, 23, and 175. Mortality levels in the capital are lower than those in the Provinces; fertility, due to the concentration of medical facilities, is probably higher. In the Western Rural Area, only the level of infant mortality seems a plausible estimate of actual conditions.

To try and achieve national estimates of fertility and mortality, the observed female age distribution, as recorded in the 1963 Census, was used in conjunction with the "official" growth rate of 1.5 per cent to locate an appropriate stable population. Fitting these parameters to one of the family of West model life tables of the Coale-Demeny system provides estimates of the crude birth and crude death rates of 48 per 1,000 and 33 per 1,000 respectively.[1]

While such frequencies are only approximations, they are at least well within the limits implied by Sierra Leone's historical, regional, social, medical, and economic development. Under the circumstances, they seem the most reasonable estimates that can be made.

Future Trends

Without new and more complete data, one can only speculate as to probable trends in the postcensus period. In general, it would appear that fertility has not changed much since 1963, while the expectation of life may have increased slightly. With further improvements in social and medical conditions, more substantial reductions in mortality must be anticipated. If such changes occur in the absence of a significant reduction in fertility, the result will be a rapid increase in the rate of population

[1] Ansley J. Coale and Paul Demeny. *Regional Model Life Tables and Stable Populations*. Princeton University Press, 1966.

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growth. In all likelihood, such an increase is imminent.

Density

In spite of a moderate rate of population growth, Sierra Leone has a relatively high population density. With approximately 90 persons per square mile, her density is roughly three times the continental average. Moreover, with the exception of the Western Area (907 persons per square mile) density is relatively even throughout the country, with a range of only 25 persons per square mile separating the most sparsely and the most densely settled provinces. In this sense, Sierra Leone's population of 2.5 million is quite substantial in relation to its land area—a fact often overlooked when total numbers are considered.

Population Movement

While international migration played a large role in Sierra Leone's past, only 2.4 per cent of the population enumerated in 1963 had been born outside Sierra Leone. Internal migration of the indigenous population, on the other hand, was quite significant. According to the 1963 Census, 27.5 per cent of the native born population were living outside the chiefdom in which they were born, the men (30.2 per cent) being somewhat more mobile than the women (25.0 per cent).

At the provincial level, the Northern Province had a larger proportion of its population living in the same chiefdom in which they were born (84.9 per cent) than did either the Southern Province (68.7 per cent) or the Eastern Province (64.1 per cent). The Western Area, including the capital city, showed the greatest effect of internal migration, with only half of its population born locally. In spite of the attraction of the capital, however, three out of every four persons remain residents of the chiefdom in which they were born, while the mobility of most others is apparently limited by provincial boundaries.

Urban/Rural Distribution

Employing an urban threshold of 1,000, 25 per cent of the total population in 1963 lived in places of more than 1,000 inhabitants. If levels of 2,000 or 5,000 are used, the urban share of the total population drops to 19 per cent and 13 per cent respectively.

Small towns (1,000–1,999 population) and the capital city of Freetown contribute about equally to the urban population; together, they constitute roughly 50 per cent of the total. Significantly, the smaller communities, in the 1,000–1,999 population range, make up about 60 per cent of the total number of urban locations.

In general, Sierra Leone's pattern of urbanization is characterized by a large number of small towns or large villages of doubtful urban character, on the one hand; and by the dominance of a single urban center, on the other. Thus the population of the capital in 1963 was roughly equal to that of all locations in the 1,000–1,999 population range, and five times that of the next largest town.

Since 1963, Freetown's population has been increasing by 4–6 per cent a year. This is a more rapid rate of growth than that experienced by most other urban locations, which seem to be increasing by about 2.5–3.5 per cent per year. Overall, the urban share of total population will continue to increase, but not at a rate that will radically or immediately alter the rural or semirural character of life in Sierra Leone.

Age Structure

The age-sex distribution provided by the 1963 Census suggests a typical pattern of age-misreporting common to most tropical African populations. On balance, this distortion tends to reduce the proportion of the population under the age of 15. When the observed age distribution is adjusted to conform to an appropriate stable population, the percentage of children under the age of 15 in 1963 increases from 37 per cent to 41 per cent. Assuming quasi-stable conditions, this proportion would remain virtually unchanged up to the present.

Ethnic and Religious Composition

Sierra Leone is not a homogeneous ethnic or religious community. In 1963, the Mende, Temne, Limba, and Kono were the largest tribes, with 30.9, 29.8, 8.4, and 4.8 per cent of the total population respectively. This approximate equality between the two largest ethnic groups has no parallel on the religious level; one-third of the population are Christian and two-thirds are Muslim.

Literacy

At the time of the 1963 Census, 7.7 per cent of the population 10 years of age and over claimed to be able to read and write in English. Not surprisingly, 70 per cent of the literate population was male and only 30 per cent female. In the opinion of the Central Statistics Office, an "upward bias" in these figures must be considered probable.

At the provincial level, the Western Area had the highest rate of literacy, 38 per cent; followed by the Southern Province, with 6 per cent; the Eastern Province, with 5 per cent; and the Northern Province, with 3 per cent. In all instances, males were disproportionately represented in the literate population, this disparity being greatest in the Northern Province (81 per cent male) and least in the Western Area, where the male share of the literate population was about 60 per cent.

Literacy in Mende, Temne, and Arabic was also tabulated in the 1963 Census. About 2 per cent of the population claimed a reading and writing ability in one or more of these languages. Allowing for an inevitable overlap between English and Tribal-Arabic literacy, and the likelihood of exaggeration on the part of many respondents, the true level of literacy in Sierra Leone may have been substantially below 10 per cent in 1963.

Economic Composition

In 1963, of the population 10 years of age or older, 61.6 per cent were economically active. The ratio of males to females in the civilian labor force was roughly 2:1. Only 2.2 per cent of the working force held professional, managerial, or clerical jobs; 15.5 per cent were employed in mining, transport, skilled and unskilled labor, and service occupations. As would be expected, 77 per cent of the working population were involved in farming and/or fishing. This was true of 70 per cent of the working males and 90 per cent of the working females.

Population Growth and Social-Economic Development

Relationship to National Income

Since independence in 1961, Sierra Leone has made great efforts to improve social and economic conditions. These activities, frequently involving costly long-term development proj-

ects with little immediate economic return, had the following results. The public debt was increased 2.5 times, between December 1961 and December 1966; the country's external reserves were reduced by almost half between 1960 and 1968. Unfortunately, the government was spending at a high rate during a period of low overall economic performance. As the following figures suggest, the economy was growing during 1964–67, but the pace was very slow: the gross national product, in Leones, rose from Le 196 million to Le 243 million; the national income increased from Le 182 million to Le 223 million, and the per capita income rose from Le 78 to Le 92 (1 Leone = US $1.20).

Given these conditions, an increase in the present rate of population growth, from perhaps 1.5 per cent to 2.0 per cent or even 3.0 per cent, would not help the process of economic development. On the contrary, such an increase would limit economic development by reducing the nation's capacity to save and invest. Reflecting this, total output as well as per capita income would tend to increase more slowly when the population is growing rapidly than when it is growing slowly or moderately.

Relationship to Agriculture

Although agriculture's share of the working population approaches 80 per cent, it contributes only about one-third to the gross domestic product. As the Bank of Sierra Leone points out, this is a conspicuously low proportion when compared with an average of 50–70 per cent for all African nations. Reflecting this imbalance, the proportion of subsistence agricultural output to total agricultural output may be 65 per cent.

The low productivity of the agricultural sector may be attributed largely to the fact that the labor force is poorly educated, ill trained, and inadequately equipped with capital. Accordingly, a rapid increase in the agricultural population would not necessarily increase individual productivity. To the contrary, an increasing rate of population growth would make it more difficult to improve the quality or training of the agricultural labor force, and provide the additional capital needed for its productive employment.

Relationship to Size of Labor Force

The level of underemployment and unemployment is an indication of the country's rate of economic development. According to a recent report of the Bank of Sierra Leone:

> Despite the overall growth in employment, job opportunities have not kept pace with the supply of labour in the urban and industrialised areas; consequently, unemployment has been rising steadily and unfilled vacancies diminishing rapidly. This situation is reflected in the growing number of active job seekers who are unable to secure gainful employment. The statistics show that the number of registered unemployed rose by 100 per cent between December 1961 and December 1966.

Recognizing that registered unemployment represents only a small fraction of total unemployment, it is not unlikely that the problem actually affects as much as 10 per cent of the civilian labor force.

Since the present rate of economic development is not sufficient to eliminate unemployment, no less underemployment, it is clear that a rapid increase in the number of people seeking employment would only further aggravate the problem. Sierra Leone's present rate of population growth, therefore, is more than adequate to ensure a sufficient labor supply for the foreseeable future.

Relationship to Social Welfare Expenditures

In the post-independence period, the improvement of social and medical services has had a high priority. As a result, the proportion of total current expenditure used for such purposes increased from about 25 per cent in 1963 to about 30 per cent in 1966.

In interpreting this trend, the Bank of Sierra Leone concluded that "the growth in social expenditures accounts in large measure for an overall rate of growth in government expenditures much higher than that of GNP." With the government's recent proposal to greatly improve such services in the coming fiscal year, this relationship may well continue.

Under these circumstances, a more rapid rate of population growth would increase the total demand for such improved services, with the result that a larger proportion of national income would have to be employed for this purpose and hence diverted from more economically productive use.

Education. According to the 1963 Census, 90 per cent of the population over five years of age had never attended school. Overall, only about 3 per cent had been in the school system long enough to derive any meaningful benefit from it. Sierra Leone hopes to progress to universal primary education by 1990 according to the following time table: 1963, 24 per cent of primary school age children attending; 1970, 49 per cent; 1980, 70 per cent; 1990, 100 per cent.

Total primary school enrollment rose from 79,132 in 1960–61 to 131,545 in 1967–68, a 66 per cent increase. The proportionate gain, in relation to the normal or total school age population, is more difficult to compute. If the primary school age population is taken to mean all children between the ages of 5 and 14,[2] then the percentage of this population in the primary school system increased from 20 per cent to 22 per cent between 1963–64 and 1967–68.

On the other hand, if the primary school population were defined in such a way as to include only 6–8 age groups, the proportion of eligible children within the system would have increased from approximately 24 per cent in 1963 to 38 per cent in 1967–68.[3] On balance, it seems clear that the correct figure for 1967–68 falls somewhere between this high estimate of 38 per cent and the previous low estimate of 22 per cent. In either case, it leaves Sierra Leone far removed from the projected goal of 50 per cent enrollment by 1970.

Furthermore, such a goal is unattainable in terms of absolute enrollment alone, regardless of the actual size of the school age population. The education plan calls for a total primary school enrollment of 174,961 by 1970. This would require an absolute increase of approximately 43,400 over a two-year period, or an increase of

[2] To arrive at this figure the total population, corrected for 5 per cent underenumeration and increased at an annual growth rate of 1.5 per cent, was apportioned according to a stable age distribution having the same proportion of the population under the age of 10.

[3] Primary education is officially a seven-year course—ages 5–12—but most children take 8–10 years to complete it. The above figures are based on the as yet unrealized goal of limiting the primary school population to six age groups by eliminating grade seven and greatly reducing retardation within the system.

roughly 15 per cent in each year. Such gains cannot be achieved within the present educational budget. It is necessary to conclude, therefore, that Sierra Leone will not reach the halfway point in its progress to universal primary education by 1970.

At the secondary level the picture is more optimistic. Absolute enrollment rose from 6,265 in 1960–61 to 22,119 in 1967–68, a 253 per cent increase. In relation to the age group 15–19, the proportion enrolled in the secondary system increased from about 5 per cent in 1963–64 to about 9 per cent in 1967–68. Moreover, continued progress at this rate would bring the total level of secondary enrollment reasonably close to the target level of 28,700 in 1970. At this point, approximately 11 per cent of the eligible population would be in the secondary school system. Whether this would represent an acceptable proportion of the total age group 15–19 is problematic.

Evaluation. It appears likely that Sierra Leone will not meet its educational enrollment quotas by the year 1970, particularly as regards primary education. If a rapid increase in the school age population were added to the existing problem, the goal of universal primary education would recede far into the next century. For example, if the present child mortality of perhaps 40–50 per cent, were reduced by half, without a compensatory reduction in fertility, subsequent pressure on school facilities would be overwhelming. Indeed, under this assumption, the proportion outside the school system might increase rather than decrease over time.

Population Programs

While the government maintains an official position of neutrality with regard to family planning, it allows the Planned Parenthood Association to provide services in public as well as private facilities. In practice, this activity has been essentially limited to Freetown and the Western Area.

From 1959 to April 1969 the Freetown clinic, operating with IPPF funds and commodities supplied by the Pathfinder Fund and the U.S. Agency for International Development, has had a case load totaling 1,189 new clients, starting with 48 new cases in 1959 and reaching 350 in 1968.

There is only one other clinic in the country, which was opened in Bo in February 1969. Staffed by one part-time physician, the clinic had 34 new cases during its first month of operation.

The effect of existing family planning activities is negligible. Whether this will continue to be the case will depend largely on the government's policy. If it maintains its present position of neutrality, this will effectively preclude any significant increase in family planning in Sierra Leone. Conversely, if it endorses and financially supports family planning, substantial progress might be possible in the near future. At the moment, there is no indication that such a change is in the offing.

Educational and Scientific Efforts

University of Sierra Leone

In the academic year 1968–69, the Geography Department of Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, offered one course in population. A second course in population may be added to the curriculum in the next session. Opportunities for graduate work, either in the United States or locally, may be available for students completing these courses.

Demographic Survey

A national demographic survey is now being conducted with the support of the Population Council. It should provide limited information on fertility and mortality levels, as well as conventional KAP material.

1970 Census

At the government level, a second census round is planned for the early 1970's. As in 1963, the Central Statistics Office will have primary responsibility for this project. It is hoped that more questions of immediate demographic relevance will be included in the new schedule.

Summary

In its analysis of demographic conditions in Sierra Leone, the 1931 Census Report concluded:

> Though the people are naturally prolific, conditions exist which restrict the growth of population. However, the evidence generally goes to prove that the population tends to keep above the static. In favor of its growth, it may be said that subsistence is sufficient . . . ; marriage is almost universal . . . ; the eliminating checks of war, famine and pestilence are not present; and preventative checks . . . are rare. On the other hand, the main factors operating to restrict the population are the [endemic] diseases already mentioned. The chief toll is taken in infant and child life due to lack of [adequate] ante-natal and post-natal care and the many risks to which infants and children are exposed.

These conditions seem to have continued more or less unchanged up to the 1960's. But with gradual improvements in child and maternal health care, and the progressive control of infectious disease, a substantial reduction in mortality is inevitable. Since there is little prospect for a comparable reduction in fertility, the rate of population growth will increase rapidly in the near future. This will enormously complicate Sierra Leone's already difficult problems of social and economic development.

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